

THE HEIR TO SOOTHOID

Astro, Seer of Secrets, Settles a Case of Mixing the Babies Up

BY ALAN BRAGHAMPTON

Drawings by George Brehm

Touch me not, mother Who art thou
To lay a hand on me?
My soul was driven through sun
and moon
Ere I was come to thee!

ASTRO'S mellow barytone voice vibrated through the great studio with a note of mystery, as he read these lines of Anna Hempstead Branch. Then he dropped the book and gazed at Valeska, his assistant, for awhile thoughtfully. She was sitting on the floor, propped up by gorgeous cushions, playing with a huge piece of rock crystal cut in the form of a tetrahedron. A shaft of light fell on her lap, piercing the obscurity of the apartment. The crystal caught and gathered the rays, then broke them, shattering the white light into streaks of brilliant color. At the other end of the room a spot of radiance appeared on the ceiling, splendid with the hues of a butterfly. She looked up to the master as he ceased reading.

"There's the poet's immortal challenge to the monist," he said, almost in a reverie. "It's a cry as old as the world, and, I think, idealistic as it is, mystic as it is, with as sure a foundation as that of modern determinism. But this is modern too. It voices an idea that, though it has long been common to oriental thought, is new to the Western civilizations. What relation, after all, is the son to the father? See how sublimely Miss Branch herself answers that passionate question:

"If thou came out of the moon and star
I plucked thee forth by my desire.
I can hold thee burning in my hand!
It was my hand that shaped the fire!"

Astro rose, and, as was his custom when absorbed in any subject, began to walk up and down the room. His keen, dark eyes stared straight in front of him without looking at the priceless decorations of the studio. His hands were clasped behind his back across his red silken robe. His turban nodded as he spoke. Valeska watched him eagerly. These philosophic moods, alternating with the active, eager phases of his mind, when he was pursuing the track of some almost insoluble mystery, fascinated her. It was at such times, she thought, that he betrayed his real self.

"There's the purely transcendental side," he said. "But the materialistic miracle is as marvelous,—the fact that protoplasm is immortal, that characteristics, physical and mental, are handed down in the infinitesimal cell that persists from generation to generation in the 'id' and the 'biophor.' Tricks of speech and gesture, abnormal formations of the organs of the body, temper, emotion,—all transmitted in that tiny primordial atom! What has science done but induce us to believe the impossible?"

A bronze clock in the anteroom pealed out the hour of ten, preceded by the Westminster chime of four staves of music. Valeska rose, but hesitated, unwilling to interrupt the seer's soliloquy. But he threw off his absorbed mood, came back to her, and smiled.

"Well," he said, "one must earn one's living. What's on for to-day?"

"You have an appointment with Colonel Mixer at ten."

"Very well. When he comes, show him in. I shall now give an imitation of an oriental adept of the fifth circle. Pass me the crystal ball, Valeska, and touch off that incense in the Japanese burner. Am I properly sedate and scornful? Bah! What rubbish it all is—and how it goes with the mob!"

HE took his favorite position on the couch, drew up his narghile, and assumed a picturesque attitude. Valeska left him and took her place in the reception room. In ten minutes she ushered in Colonel Mixer, bowed, and left the two together, dropping the dull red velvet portières behind her. She did not, however, remain in the reception room. Instead, she passed into a room connecting with the studio, where in a combination of mirrors she could see all that happened and hear the talk.

The new client was a military looking man of some fifty years, with iron gray hair and a curling white mustache. He had an active air, full of strength and character and showing his habit of command. Scrupulously dressed, immaculately clean, well groomed from head to heels, he was what might have been called both handsome and distinguished in appearance. His voice was crisp and hearty.

"May I smoke?" he asked. "Dashed if I can talk without smoking! I have to treat my confounded



"Biggest Fake on Earth and Most Remunerative," Said Colonel Mixer.

strokes, of course. It ought to be suppressed by law, and it's only a question of time when this Pure Food agitation will knock it out of business. It's a crime against civilization; but all the same it has made four millions for that disreputable old uncle of mine, and now the whole works belong to me. Brings me in eighteen thousand a year. I'm afraid to stop it, and more afraid not to. But that's not the point."

He rolled his cigar from one corner of his mouth to another, flicked a fleck of dust from his spotless trousers, and looked calmly at Astro. The seer smiled, despite himself, waved his hand dispassionately for the other to proceed, and waited.

"The thing is this," the Colonel went on. "I'm an expert on ordnance, and I've traveled all over the world for the Government. Never at home from one year's end to another. I came back to find myself immensely rich, last October, and at the same time up against a mystery that it's practically impossible to solve. So I come to you. Understand?"

"Scarcely, as yet," said the master. "Kindly go on."

"Why, see here. I have a son—or thought I had. Query: Is he my son at all? And if not, who is to inherit the 'Soothoid' millions? That's the question I have to decide right away. I have angina pectoris. I'm likely to die any fine day. I don't want a chap that's no relative of mine to get away with all that money, do I?"

"My dear Colonel," said Astro, "you'll have to give me more information than that, before I decide such a weighty question for you. What do you mean by saying you don't know whether he's your son or not. You mean you suspect—"

The Colonel roared. "Oh, Lord, no, not that!" he exclaimed. "This is no question of matrimonial infelicity, you know. I'm the father of a child, all right; only, the question is, What child?" He put it very gravely, as if the matter could be settled by a mere nod. "Tell me the whole story," Astro's brows bent on his client.

WELL, then, see here. When the child was born, my wife was in a hospital on Long Island. I wanted her to have the very best of care, especially as I had to be away so much. Well, the night the child was born, the hospital took fire. It spread so quickly that they couldn't get the patients out fast enough. The doctors working over my wife didn't dare leave her, and they worked against time. Just after they finished with her and another case of the

nerves like a confounded pack of dogs, confound it! Thanks."

In reply, Astro had drawn up his water pipe and inhaled a long whiff of the aromatic Russian tobacco that smoldered in the bowl. The Colonel produced a cigar, bit off the end, and lighted it.

"I suppose you've seen the advertisements of 'Soothoid,' that chewing gum stuff, all over the town, haven't you?" he began.

Astro nodded gravely. "Biggest fake on earth," said the Colonel, "and the most remunerative. My old uncle invented it, you know. Conceived the brilliantly vile idea of doping ordinary chicle with a tincture of opium and making chewing gum of it. 'It soothes the nerves,'—I should say it did!—'Children cry for it,' and all that sort of thing! It's mon-

same kind, the wing caught, and there was barely time to hustle everyone down stairs and outside. Do you see the situation? They had to work quick. Those surgeons showed all sorts of nerve, I can tell you. But in the confusion the two babies were somehow mixed up by the nurse. One was a boy, and one was a girl, born within ten minutes of each other. But which was my child, the boy or the girl? That's how it stands. You see at the time nothing was said to me about any uncertainty. My wife died from the shock; so did the other woman. The boy was given to me as my baby. I never suspected that there was any doubt about it, and have brought him up and educated him as my son."

"But when did you first suspect that he wasn't?" Astro asked.

"Only a month ago. The former nurse told the whole thing. Said it was on her conscience, and had been for years; so much so that she had kept track of both children. The little girl was put in an orphan asylum, as no one came to claim her; then she was adopted by a family in Newark; and now she's a salesgirl at Bloom's candy store. Working behind a counter at six the week, by Jove! and may be my daughter, and the heir to 'Soothoid'! What do you think of that? Wouldn't you worry?" He shoved his hands into his pockets and regarded the Master of Mysteries.

"The nurse isn't sure which is which?"

"No. It has been tormenting her conscience for twenty years, and she had to make a clean breast of it. All she knows is that she 'mixed those babies up'; like Little Buttercup in 'Pinafore.' So I've come to you. Doctors say it positively can't be proved, either way. I thought you might do it by the palms or crystals or something. I've seen 'em do some great stunts in India, and I believe there is something in this occult business. They tell me you have a pretty good record for that sort of thing here in New York."

The seer waved his hand modestly. "Does the boy resemble you in any way?" he asked.

"Why, he does and he doesn't. You know the



A Secret Glance from Valeska Told Him the Truth.

way things like that go. I've been told I look like everybody under the sun. I suppose I'm a type. Well, he is too. Sometimes I think he's like me, and then I doubt it. There's one funny thing, though. We both of us sleep with our thumbs curled up inside our fists. Then he has a second toe longer than his great toe, and so have I. They tell me that's rare. My father had it too, though. He has blue eyes, and so have I. Red hair, though, and there's no trace of that in my family or my wife's, that I know of."

"And the girl—have you seen her?" Astro inquired. "Of course. Went right down there immediately, and found her behind the counter—selling 'Soothoid,' by Jove! Big pompadour, rats in her hair, brass bangles, and all. What do you expect for six

a week, though? If she's my daughter, she'll soon learn how to act the part, don't your worry!"

Astro laughed again. "She hasn't been spoken to about it, I hope?"

"Oh, Lord, no! What do you take me for? I wouldn't have her building air castles for the world. I only bought a pound of cheap chocolates and talked to her a little. I've no doubt the poor girl thought I was trying to mash her. She was a nice little thing, though, for all her rats. I liked her, by Jove! I'd like to do something for her in any case, daughter or not. Her name is Miss Maverick."

"Does she resemble you or your wife?"

"Why, the funny part of it is that she does, in a far away sort of fashion. I noticed that she was left handed too, like me. Blue eyes; but her hair was

hennaed, so I couldn't tell about that. Cute little thing, she is. Confound it! I did like her immensely, at first sight."

"Well," said the seer, after reflecting awhile, "I must confess that you have set a difficult problem for me. But I think that it can be determined through astral means. No doubt you have consulted some medium already?"

"Oh, they're all a lot of fakers! They told me that the boy was mine and that the girl was, too, both."

"I agree with you. The ordinary mediums are an ignorant and unscrupulous lot. I have occult methods unknown except in the Himalayas of India. But it will be difficult, I am afraid. But may I ask

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AMERICAN ENTHUSIASM

By Robert McCormack

ASPEAKER in the recent campaign criticized President Roosevelt for his overpraise of the strenuous life and for the alleged harm this constant excitement has done the country.

While there is reason to believe that the orator was carried away by political bias in leveling his remarks at the President, there can be no doubt that he touched upon one of the most vital of American characteristics. But are we too strenuous, as he inferred? Are we too easily carried off our feet? Are we, in short, volatile and overspontaneous?

Nowhere in the world do crowds gather as they do in this country, both in cities and in villages. A trolley car does not break down that a crowd does not gather about it, eager for some excitement. A horse does not kick the dashboard off a wagon, that a good part of the village does not come out and view the wreck, eager to see the thing repeated. Is this a sign of too highly developed strenuousness, or too nerve-strained tension, or is it the healthy sign of a keen mind and awakened interest?

The campaign gave added emphasis to the fact that we flock in crowds; that the mind of the majority runs in the same groove,—the seeking after excitement and the craving for something unusual. Taft and Bryan drew equally large crowds, simply because, regardless of the man, the cheering and the crowds were enough to tempt people. There was a stimulus in the air, a superheated excitement that drove people on, roused their energies till they cheered and yelled, regardless of party or their personal opinions.

But is it, as has been charged, a fault? Two boys may be playing marbles, and no one notice them, and for hours they will play without creating a crowd. But let six men stop to watch them, and instantly, as if by magic, dozens of others will approach the small group, until there is a crowd, and for every man who leaves, another will come, all eager to take part in the excitement and to see what it is about.

Not long ago, to satisfy a theory, two men stood on the corner of Broadway and Wall-st., New York, and excitedly pointed to one of the upper windows of the Smokestack Building. In a minute, one hundred people stopped and craned their necks toward the spot, and in five minutes the street was blocked; not one person in one hundred knowing why, but all asking questions, looking skyward, and everyone of them as excited as if it was a dog fight or a fire.

But is it a bad thing? It signifies something pretty important. In China these experimenters in psychology could point skyward in vain; for the stolid Chinamen would look at them for a minute and then walk on. In Russia they would not excite any more attention. In England they might stir up a little amazement, but no excitement. And all be-

cause the people of those countries have no superheated nerve force that demands an outlet. Yet, by the very creation of that nerve force that some people deplore, the American people have generated

an energy such as these more stolid nations never possess.

It is the residue of the vast furnaces of our material life that these critics complain of; but they forget that the very fact that we possess these furnaces makes this residue a necessity; and to destroy that is to choke the fires that have made the country the power it is.

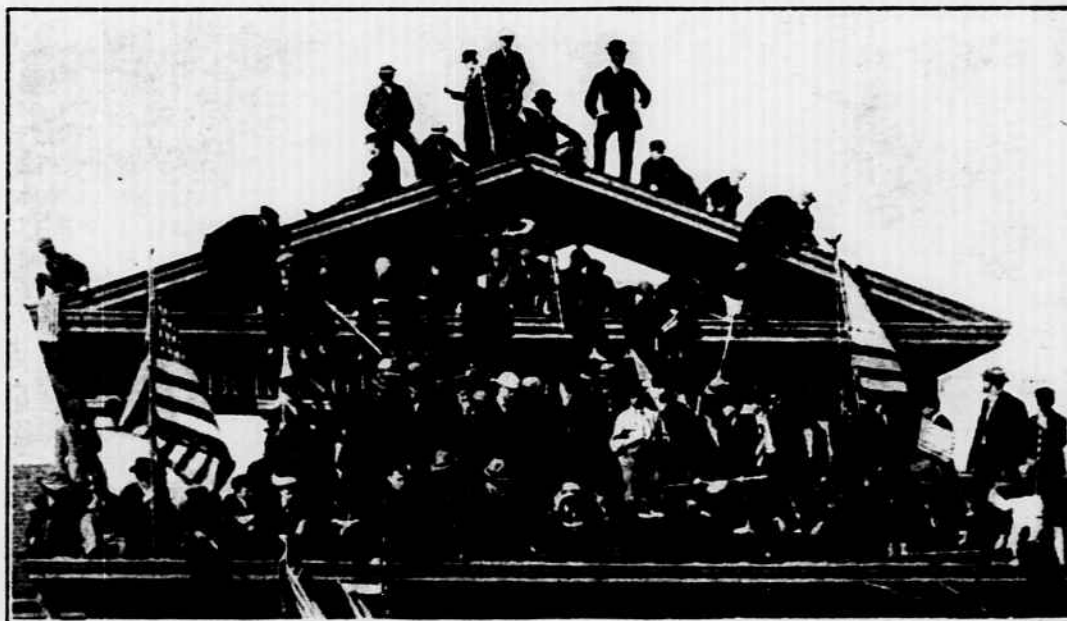
The boy who sits perched in a tree watching a ball game till his limbs are cramped and sore, does not do it because he loves the game so much as because within him is that native energy that must cry out in excitement. The thousands who go to automobile races and camp out all night and undergo bodily strain and fatigue for the sake of seeing the race, do not care so much for the machines, nor for the men who run them, as they do for the joy of excitement and the wild relief it affords. They are the cinders of American life that are being raked out. Those cheers are the ashes that are shaken out of the furnace.

We are said to be a sport loving people, because we gather in crowds and cheer. We do it because we can cheer, or at least find a vent for excitement. The sport is secondary. If cheering and the waving of hats was a part of church service, if instead of listening to the sermon respectfully and in silence it got to be the custom to applaud good points, our churches would be packed to the doors. And then we should be called a religious people. But, as in sport, it would be only the letting off of steam.

In this country, crowds are the easiest thing in the world to attract. A barker at a county fair gathers a multitude about him, not so much by what he says as by what we think or hope he might say. The man standing on the steps of the general store, excitedly telling his companion of an experience he has just had, will find a dozen people crowd near him to hear his tale. It is the same everywhere.

But is it a harm? Are we too strenuous? So long as we have the safety valve, we are not. So long as we gather in crowds and cheer and yell and wave our hats, so long as we rush after the fire engines or run across the street to watch the horse that has slipped on the ice, we are safe.

For it is the native strenuousness that has built the nation. It is part of us. Roosevelt did not create it, nor did he add to it. God did that when He gave us our climate. For that is at the bottom of our chief characteristic, and inferentially it is at the bottom of our love for crowds. After all, we are a hybrid people. The blood of all nations is in us yet; we are different from all others. The Russian, the German, and the Celt change after they have been here ten years. They all become strenuous; they add to our crowds. And the climate does it all. It begets our strenuousness, our enthusiasm, and our power, and so long as the solar system remains as it is we shall, for safety's sake, yell and cheer, if only we get half a chance.



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The Heir to Soothoid

Continued from page 10

you what is the matter with your eyes, Colonel?" The Colonel stared. "My eyes? Nothing except a slight astigmatism. I have some glasses; but I never wear them. Why?"

"They seem peculiar to me. You know that the eye has been called the 'window of the soul.' The phrase is trite; but it contains a germ of truth. I can tell a great deal from the eye, as much as from the palm or the voice. If you don't mind, I'd like to examine yours with the ophthalmoscope. My methods are my own; but I don't hesitate to make use of the instruments known to modern science. After all, the ophthalmoscope merely enables one to see through the cornea into the retina and the optic plexus."

With that, he called in Valeska, who darkened the great studio. Then she turned on a single electric lamp which had a blue glass bulb. The thread of incandescent wire showed purple. Then, attaching his instrument to the wires, he went up to the Colonel and peered through the little slit in the holder. He gazed for some moments in silence, then switched on the lights again.

"Now," he added, "I have to make a request that may seem absurd. You may have heard of divination by moles. It is an almost unknown art; but, while not absolute, there is much to be learned from the relative disposition of such marks on the human body. Casanova, you may recall, if you have read his memoirs, practised the art, and had a theory regarding the symmetry of distribution of moles. For instance, if one has a mole on the right cheek, there is a probability that there will be another to correspond with it on the left hip. We are tracing, you understand, mere physical heredity. That is all you require, I believe. The relation of souls is far beyond our ken."

"That's true," said the Colonel. "People often seem to bear no spiritual relationship to their parents." "Where the soul comes from will probably always remain unsettled by modern science," Astro agreed. "It is one of the world questions that even Haeckel gave up. Our oriental philosophers have their explanation; but for that one has to know the whole lore of the Vedantic sacred books. But there are laws that govern the transmission of physical characteristics. Now, therefore, if you will kindly step into this room and remove your clothes, I shall chart your birthmarks and compare them with your horoscope."

Ten minutes later the seer joined Valeska in the studio. In his hand was a little diagram, an outline of the human form shown in four positions, from the front and back, the right and left sides. Little crosses were marked where the moles on the Colonel's body appeared. He handed it to his assistant with a wink, and she left immediately. The Colonel came in soon after, as faultlessly dressed as ever, and, after a few more questions from Astro, was permitted to take his leave.

NOW," said Astro, when he was again alone with Valeska, "you have a delicate piece of detective work to do. Do you think you can get a position in Bloom's confectionery store and scrape up an acquaintance with Miss Maverick?"

"I shall be delighted to try," was her reply. "I suppose I'll earn six dollars a week at it, won't I?"

"Colonel Mixer is worth millions. I expect it will pay you pretty well."

"Besides being lots of fun!" Valeska's eyes shone. "But, really, it seems to me that there's a much simpler way of settling the question. Why not marry young Mixer to Miss Maverick? Then, whoever is the true heir, he or she'll have the use of the money."

"I've thought of that—as a last resort. Well, we'll have to try that, perhaps. At any rate, it's as pretty a task as the other, and you ought to be able to manage it, if anyone can."

"Oh, you can't make a person fall in love so easily as that!" said Valeska, turning away.

"I think you could make anyone fall in love," he answered, gazing at her.

For awhile there was silence between them. Then, with apparent effort, he took up the subject they had left.

"The evidence is pretty equally balanced between the two," he said. "The son curls in his thumb in his sleep; but many do that. The same with the long second toe. Both have blue eyes; so that's no test. The girl affects him mentally, or spiritually; but that's merely sentimental evidence. Her sinistrality, of course, amounts to nothing, nor does the faint resemblance he remarked to himself. We have to have some positive physical abnormality in order to prove heredity. Mere probability doesn't count."

"How about fingerprints?" Valeska asked. "We know little of that. We have no records of hereditary transmission in that direction. It's too bad."

"What was the ophthalmoscope test for? And why all that patter of moles and birthmarks?"

"A mere shot in the air. Do you know what I brought down, though? The Colonel has an optic disk—that's where the optic nerve comes into the retina—of a most peculiar shape, like an angel's wings. I just stumbled on it, in the hope of finding something peculiar that wouldn't appear to any observer. Also, he has a curious red birthmark of almost the same shape on his left shoulder. I saw it when I was pretending to diagram the moles. Now what we have to do is to examine both youngsters in some way. You'll have to patch up a friendship with the girl, Miss Maverick, while I investigate the boy. His father will help in that.

I'll fix it: Paint a doctor's sign on the door of my laboratory, and with the father's directions, medically inspect the lad for life insurance. That's easy. If we find one of the stigmata, the proof will be strong enough. Should we find two, it's a positive certainty."

A WEEK afterward found Valeska behind the counter at Bloom's, selling candy and soda water, dressed in white, with a pompadour as big as any of those in the shop. Her bare arms were heavy with bracelets, her language was slangy and facetious. Her companion at the counter was Miss Maverick, known to the other employees as Bessie. It did not take Valeska long to cement a friendship.

Bessie was a demure little miss, who did not by any means tell all she knew to a chance acquaintance. But Valeska asked no questions. Her conversation was a monologue, apparently artless, but cleverly contrived to throw the most suspicious off her guard. She asked Bessie's advice on this and that; she fished for Bessie's compliments; she gave Bessie hardly a chance for a word. A week went by without a move in the desired direction. Then Valeska came to the shop with a tale of misfortune,—of a lost purse and other pathetic details. Bessie offered to share her own room with her. From that moment all was easy. Valeska gradually talked less; Bessie gradually talked more. The two soon became real friends.

Valeska's first report to Astro was sensational. "What do you think?" she announced, "Bessie knows all about the 'Soothoid' affair, and the Colonel, and even the Colonel's son! One of those mediums gave the whole thing away to her, and tried to get her to stand in with him to claim the heirship of the estate. But she's the squarest little brick in the world, Bessie is! She's a dear; she's pure gold! She has looked up the Colonel's business herself, and is all ready to fall in love with the Colonel's son, just for himself alone. It's going to be easier than I thought."

"But how about the birthmarks?" Astro inquired.

"Oh, you've no idea how hard it was to find that out, till she had a little touch of rheumatism. Then I offered to rub liniment on it, and—well, she has a birthmark, something the shape of what you said, an angel's wings."

"What?" Astro cried.

"It's true. And how about Willie Mixer?"

"Well, he has a birthmark too," said Astro.

Valeska burst into a laugh. "Thereby proving that the earth is round, or something like that, doesn't it? Well, what to do now, I don't see."

"You forget the ophthalmoscope."

"Have you looked at Willie's eyes?"

"Yes, and his optic disk is the ordinary, normal circle."

"Oh, I'm so glad! Then there's a chance for Bessie's making good for the 'Soothoid' millions."

"If you can get her up here for me to examine her eyes."

"But what if, after all, I can make the match without?"

"Oh, I spoke to the Colonel about that. He'd be delighted. He really has taken a fancy to Bessie."

"Then Willie must see her."

"I agree. And I've been thinking that in any case Willie should be told. If he loses his money, he'll have to know, anyway. And I see no reason why he shouldn't know now. He's really a fine chap, a gentleman in every sense of the word. If I know anything of psychology, the thing will appeal to him as immensely romantic."

IT was with considerable interest, therefore, that Valeska, three days later, saw Willie Mixer enter Bloom's, cast his eyes about the shop, and walk toward the counter behind which Bessie Maverick stood. She saw Bessie blush; but the conversation was too low to be overheard. When the time came for the girls to leave the shop, instead of Bessie's accompanying Valeska to their room, she excused herself and went off alone. Valeska followed at a discreet distance. In five minutes she saw Willie Mixer overtaking Bessie, and the two walked off like old friends.

The next day he came in again. Valeska asked no questions. Bessie had grown reserved. But she did not go this night, either, to the little dairy place where the two girls usually took their dinner. So it went on for another week, Bessie seeing the rich young fellow two or three times.

That next Sunday, as the two girls sat in their little room on East 10th-st., Bessie began to cry. Valeska's arm was about her neck immediately, and, through her sobs, Bessie came out with the whole story.

"He wants to marry me!" she confessed. "And I love him so much that I won't! I know it's all on account of this miserable money, and he only wants to be fair with me, and divide. I simply can't accept him on that account! He'd think, anyway, I was after him on account of his money, even if I didn't think he was after me only because of his conscience. It's hopeless, my dear, hopeless! I hope I'll die and end it that way! I wish I might never see a package of 'Soothoid' again as long as I live!"

"Oh, of course you'll marry him," Valeska said. "I'm sure he's in love with you."

"He is not! He talks all the time about our dividing the money; so I'm sure he only wants to arrange it like one of those royal family complications I've read about. I've got to tell some one!" she went on. "I'm breaking my heart with it. I have no mother and no father," here she broke off to stare wildly at Valeska,

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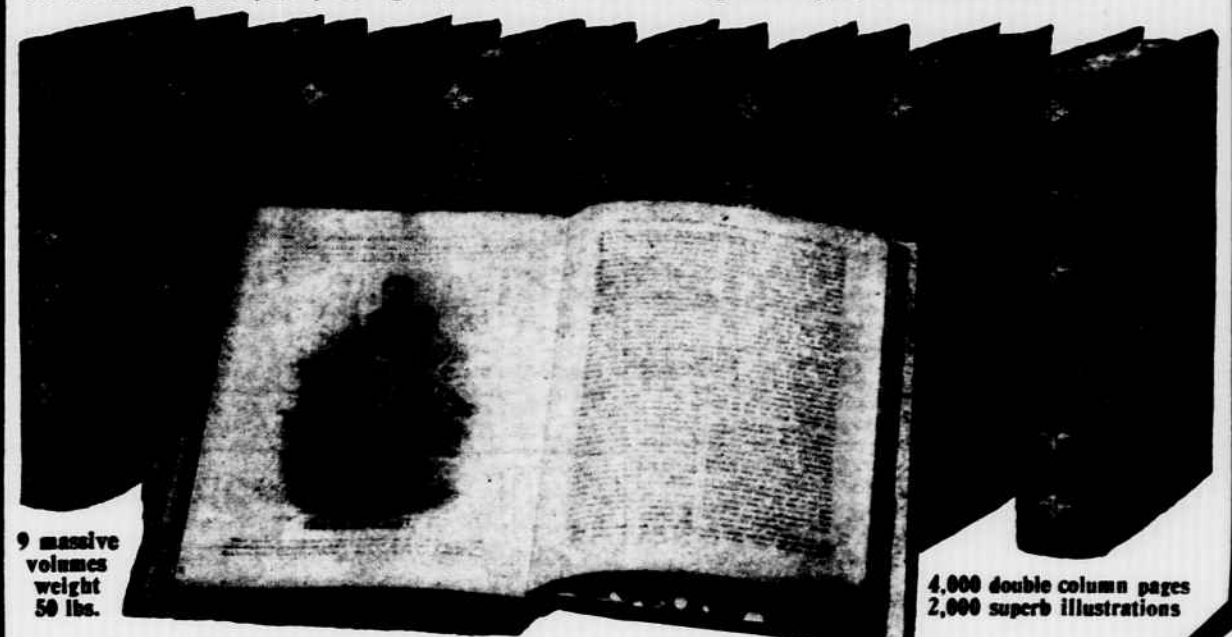
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"unless the Colonel is my father, and so I tell you! Oh, dear! it can never be settled! That's the horrible part of it. If that horrid old nurse had only been more careful of us!" and she laughed through her tears hysterically. "What shall I do, Valeska, what shall I do?"

"Do you really want my advice?" Valeska asked.

Bessie snuggled closer to her friend. "I have a friend," Valeska said slowly, "a man whom I know you can trust. He is the wisest person in the world, it seems to me. He has been my friend a long time. He saved me from what was worse than death."

"Are you in love with him?" Bessie interrupted.

Valeska ignored the remark. "He is a palmist and an astrologer, and I used to work for him. He has solved some of the most astonishing mysteries in this city. He is continually doing good. You can be sure of him."

"What must I do?" Bessie demanded. "He knows all about you," said Valeska. "The Colonel has told him everything, and Astro, my friend, has agreed to help solve the problem. I know I can trust you, when I tell you this. I want you to see him and ask his advice."

"I will!" Bessie rose with determination. "I'll just leave it all to him. He can't make it any worse than to tell me that I'm not the Colonel's daughter, and then that will settle it. Let's go and call on him now."

ASTRO looked up in surprise when he saw the two girls enter the studio. A secret glance from Valeska told him the truth. He nodded, and welcomed the visitor.

"I've told her everything," said Valeska. "She can be trusted. You will take my word for it, I know. And she's ready for the ophthalmoscope test."

"Is it really a proof?" Bessie asked timidly.

"My dear girl," said Astro, "if your optic disk shows itself to be the ordinary circle, nothing whatever will be proved, and the chances are equal as between you and Willie. If, on the contrary it appears like your father's,—I mean the Colonel's,—it will be ten thousand to one that you are descended from him; that you are, in fact, his daughter. Now, Valeska, put down the lights and light the blue bulb."

The room became dim and full of shadows. The incandescent wire of the electric lamp showed a rich purple. Astro took up the instrument, placed it in front of Miss Maverick's eyes and stared through the aperture.

"Come here, Valeska!"

He handed her the ophthalmoscope, adjusted it, and bade her look. Valeska gazed into the retina of Bessie's eye. At first she could distinguish nothing. Slowly she perceived the warm pink black of the eye, and in the center a ruddy spot. It was the optic disk—shaped like an angel's wings! She dropped the instrument and clasped Bessie in her arms.

"Bessie Mixer!" she exclaimed.

"No!" Bessie jumped up, staring. For a moment she stood silent, then she grasped Astro's hand.

"Oh, you won't tell him, will you?" she pleaded. "Promise me you won't ever, ever let him know! I don't want the money! I want Willie to have it, as he's always had it! Don't let him ever, ever know!"

"But it's yours!" Valeska exclaimed.

"I don't care. Don't you understand, Valeska?"

"You mean—"

"Yes!" Bessie cast down her eyes.

"Then you'll marry him, now you know that the money's rightfully yours?"

Bessie drew herself up. "Of course!" she said. "Wouldn't you?"

"It's too much for me," said Astro.

"That," said Valeska, "is because you are only a man."

"I know I'm supposed not to know anything about love," he said gloomily.

"Nothing at all!" Valeska's tone was decisive.

"And I'll have a father after all!" cried Bessie. "That's the best part of it! I've wanted a father all my life. And," she added, "he'll never know, by the way I treat him, that he's missed anything by not having a truly daughter!" She walked toward the telephone. "I'm going to ring up Willie right now," she announced.

"I'd like a daughter like that," said Astro, and without another glance he walked back into his laboratory.

The next *Seer of Secrets* story, "The Luck of the Merringtons," will appear March 14.

SOLDIERS' SLANG

By Major B. W. Atkinson

SHIVER my timbers!" "Cut my backstays!" and similar expressions

that smack of the briny deep and the sailor's life are constantly met with in reading and frequently quoted in conversation; but one seldom hears more than a few of the many queer expressions used by the sailor's brother, the soldier, who has just as odd a vernacular, which he uses in his daily life among his comrades. This difference is no doubt due to the fact that there are more stories written of the sea than there are of the army.

To the uninitiated some expressions would convey little or no sense; as for example, if a soldier was heard to say, "The top told me to report for kitchen police and help skin the spuds for slum for supper," the hearer would have several guesses before he would come anywhere near what this meant in the patter of the barracks.

In plain language, it means that the first sergeant (the ranking or orderly sergeant) had told him to report to the cook to assist him in peeling the potatoes to make the hash or stew for supper. Hash or stew is always "slum," and the first sergeant is "the top"; "kitchen police," a man who assists the cook in the preparation of meals and the washing of dishes and pans, etc.

A man who has just enlisted, or has not yet been in the ranks long enough to be considered a full fledged soldier, having learned all his duties, is called "a rooky," and woe be unto the "rooky" who gets "fresh" before an old sergeant, who has been in the ranks since before the fresh "rooky" was born! He will be told in any but gentle terms by the oldtimer, "Shut up and go about your work; your name is not yet dry on your enlistment paper!" meaning that when he was sworn in and promised to serve for three years and obey the "orders of the President and the officers appointed over him," he had signed his name to this paper and the signature had not had time to get dry.

When a man says he is going to "take on" or "take to another blanket," he means that he is going to reenlist. The Government, in the clothing allowance for each man, provides a blanket; hence the term to "take another blanket."

The guardhouse is called "the mill." Some ill behaved soldier away back in the past (the term is a very old one) no doubt thought his term in the guardhouse ground out toward its end very slowly; so he applied this now much used name to the prison of the garrison.

When the "top" says, "Get your blanket and go to the mill!" the soldier knows he is in for a tour of duty in the guardhouse; and his blanket means one or more nights, for in that much to be avoided place nothing is supplied in the way of comforts and each occupant carries with him his blanket, or more if he has them, to make his rest more comfortable.

All meals are called "chuck," and along toward mealtime the expression, "Is it not time for chuck call to blow?" is heard very frequently.

"Snowbirds" are men who enlist in the winter about the time snow begins to fall and the real snowbird puts in its appearance, and desert in the spring when the robin appears. They "take on" only to tide over the winter with its discomforts.

The oldest man in the company is "dad,"

and the youngest "the kid." Any deserter is called a "skipper."

Two men who share the same small tent or whose bunks are side by side in the barrack room are called "bunkies." This ancient term originated in the days of the very old army when the bunks were "built for two" and two men slept side by side on a mattress filled with straw and one blanket apiece. Much different from to-day, when each man has his hair mattress, pillow, sheets, and blankets! A "bunky" always has a chew, or filling for a pipe for his mate, when he might tell another man that he has not enough weed to "put under your nail."

All fines received from a court are called "blind," so that a man who received ten days in the guardhouse and a fine of five dollars would tell his comrades that he "got ten days in the mill and five blind."

A dog robber is a man who for the sake of extra money paid him by an officer takes care of his horse, his tent when in the field, and his furnace and lawn when in garrison. This term was no doubt given by some smart one who thought the soldier in working about the officer's quarters received many a titbit from the table and thus robbed the dog. The term usually used is a "striker."

The commanding officer of a company or the post is always the "old man." If he is not liked, other terms, not parlor talk, are used.

All field musicians are called "wind jammers," on account of their jamming of wind into the trumpet that calls the men to labor or rest.

Every man on the completion of his term of enlistment is given a discharge. At the bottom of his paper, in olden times, was a space in which the character borne by the man during his term of enlistment was written. If his service had been bad, this part of the discharge was cut off and it was called "a bobtail." In speaking of the length of time a man has to serve before he has completed his term of enlistment, the term "butt" means less than a year. So to say he has a year and a little less than two years he would say "a year and a butt."

There are a number of men in the ranks who save their money and lend it to others. The rate is very high. If a man borrows two dollars he must pay four at payday. This is called "cent per cent." The term "one more shingle on the White House" means that the man has completed one more tour of guard duty consisting of twenty-four hours.

Many of these terms quoted are of very old origin; so old that if you ask the oldest man in an organization when he heard it first, he will probably tell you, "Oh, it was used when I took my first blanket."

HOW LONG DOES A TREE LIVE

INQUIRY as to the general age of trees being put to an authority of the forestry service at Washington, it was said that the pine tree attained 700 years as a maximum length of life; 425 years were the allotted span of the silver fir; the larch lived 275 years; the red beech, 245; the aspen, 210; the birch, 200; the ash, 170; the elder, 145; the elm, 130.

The heart of the oak begins to rot at about the age of 300 years. Of the holly, it is said that there is a specimen 410 years old near Aschaffenburg, Germany.